

Why age matters

The brain is rebuilding. In adolescence and young adulthood, new connections form and unused ones are removed. The frontal lobe, which controls planning and self-control, matures last. The Federal Ministry of Health gives an age of about 25 up to which the brain is particularly vulnerable. And that is exactly when use is highest: among 18- to 25-year-olds, almost one in three young men used cannabis in the past year, and just under one in five young women. Among 12- to 17-year-olds, use has been falling slightly since 2019.

What starting early means.

- Dependence: starting early, especially before 16, is a well-established risk factor.
- Education: people who start before 15 and use frequently drop out of school more often on average. Whether cannabis is the cause has not been established.
- Mental health: use in adolescence is linked to more depression and suicidal thoughts in adulthood. Here too, the cause has not been conclusively established.

What the law says. Under 18, possession, cultivation and purchase are prohibited (§ 2 KCanG). No one may use cannabis in the immediate presence of minors, nor within sight of schools, playgrounds, children's and youth facilities and sports grounds (§ 5). For 18- to 20-year-olds, the law limits what cultivation associations may pass on to 30 grams a month with no more than 10% THC (§ 19 para. 3). Anyone over 21 who gives cannabis to minors must as a rule expect three months to five years in prison (§ 34). If minors are caught with cannabis, the police inform the parents and, if necessary, the youth welfare office; the aim is early intervention (§ 7). At home, cannabis must be stored safely (§ 10).

Key points

- The later you start, the better.
- Parents do not have to wait for the police: in Dortmund, Feedback, the youth counselling service of DROBS, offers early intervention and advice for parents, voluntary, free of charge and confidential.

Sources: Federal Ministry of Health, FAQ on the Cannabis Act; BIÖG (2025), Drug affinity of adolescents and young adults in Germany 2025, cannabis; Consumer Cannabis Act (KCanG).

More detail: csc.do/en/prevention/knowledge/why-age-matters/ ·

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